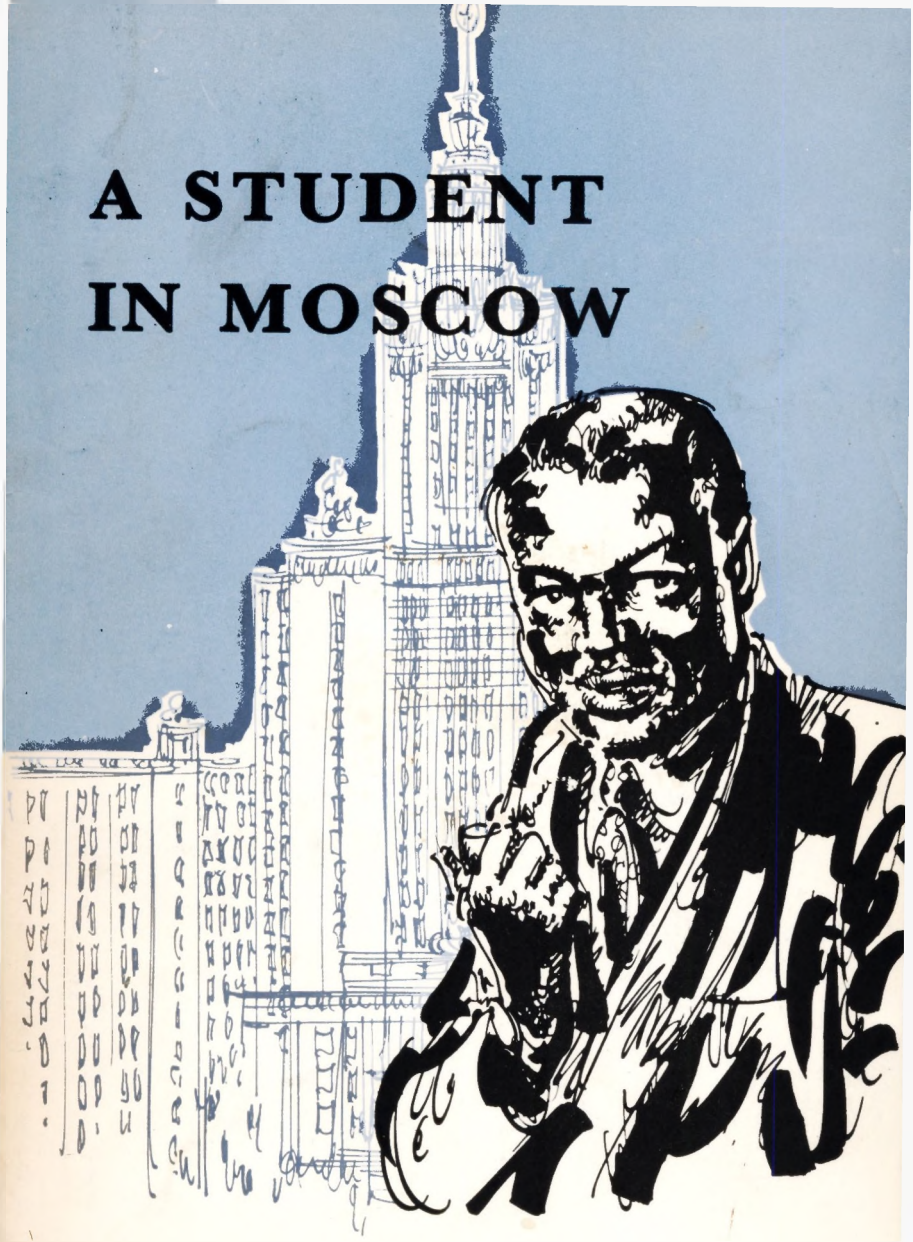
A STUDENT IN MOSCOW



BY ANDREW AMAR

A STUDENT IN MOSCOW

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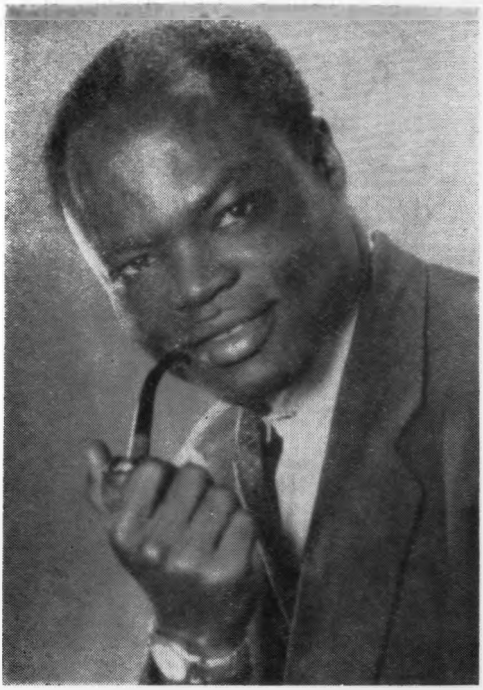

Andrew Richard Amar

Andrew Richard Amar

Andrew Amar is a 26-year-old student from Uganda. He was born in 1934 in the small town of Amogu in the Lango District of Northern Uganda. He belongs to the Lango tribe, which is one of the Nilotic group. Andrew Amar received his preliminary education in his mother tongue, which is Luo, in the town of Kalaki. He then attended secondary school, where he was taught in English, in Lira, the county town of the Lango district. He went on to the famous Makerere College School in Kampala, where he obtained his General Certificate of Education. After leaving school he worked for a few months in the Uganda Department of Community Development. He came to England to continue his education in 1957. He studied physics, chemistry and zoology at the Paddington Technical College and the Regent Street Polytechnic, as a preliminary to studying medicine.

While he was in London he was an active member of the Uganda Students' Association and the Uganda National (now People's) Congress, and of the Committee of African Organizations in Britain.

He left London for Moscow in October, 1959, and enrolled for a six-year course as an undergraduate at Moscow University to read medicine in the autumn term of that year. He studied at Moscow University for the whole of that academic year, and left the Soviet Union in the late summer of 1960. He is continuing his studies in Europe.

In the past few months many disillusioned foreign students have left Moscow. They have complained of both the treatment they received and the conditions under which they had to study. Though the accounts of their stay in Moscow differ in detail they all agree on essentials. This is the story of one such student.

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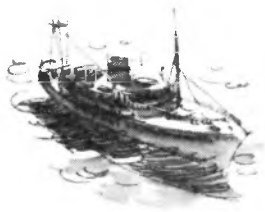
HOW I GOT TO MOSCOW

A RADAR screen and a radiogram aboard the Soviet ship *Baltika* gave me my first twinge of doubt whether I had done right in going to Russia. But by then it was too late. I was well and truly on my way, and the idea of getting one of the coveted scholarships at Moscow University drove such doubts into the remotest corner of my mind that autumn of 1959. I was full of high hopes.

It had certainly not been all plain sailing. I had tried to get scholarships to continue my higher education in England. I had also enquired at the American and Norwegian Embassies for scholarships to their countries. For one reason or another I had, so far, had no luck. I tried too with the International Union of Students (IUS). This organisation, I knew, was controlled by the Russians. Through the Uganda Students' Association in London, of which I was a member, I also learned that the IUS disposed of a certain number of scholarships in the countries of the Soviet bloc. But I had not succeeded in getting one of them. So I made enquiries from the United Nations centre in New York. From the literature sent me from there I saw that the Soviet Union offers undergraduate scholarships for six whole years. According to the terms given by the Soviet authorities in the United Nations prospectus, tuition and accommodation were free, students were paid the apparently



generous monthly allowance of 900 roubles in addition to a lump sum for the purchase of books, and there were references to free summer holidays, with pocket money, in Russia. It looked really good to me. I applied through the United Nations office. Again I was disappointed, I never received a final decision.

But I was determined now to go to study in Moscow. Another thing that had whetted my appetite was the literature I had read about higher education in Russia. I had bought pamphlets and books about it at—of all places—"Speakers' Corner" in Hyde Park, London. This world-famous spot, which I later heard my Soviet teachers refer to scornfully as the place where the British let the people play at democracy, is a favourite haunt for Soviet employees and members of the British Communist Party to peddle their literature about Soviet Russia. The books I bought were very cheap—not more than a few shillings in all—and the people I and my friends bought them from spoke in very broken, un-English accents. Whether they were actually Russians or not I could not tell at that time.

My next step was to go and try a direct approach to the Soviet Embassy. I often found the place almost besieged by other African and Asian students whom the Russians suspected of being after other things than merely scholarships. But the Embassy authorities, although very friendly, were very correct with me and told me to apply through my own Government. It was later that I learned they made things easy in West European countries only for "special" cases, and that the Soviet authorities preferred to take African or Asian students direct from their own countries. The reason for this I also learned later.

I now became almost desperate. Here was this

promised land of learning, and it was just out of my reach. That is how the Russian authorities want you to feel. They do not make it too easy for you. But I had a good friend, who was one of the founders of the Uganda National Congress, later called the Uganda People's Congress. My friend told me that Moscow had promised six scholarships for students from Uganda during 1958. He said, too, that he was going to Moscow and would there speak on my behalf to a very influential person, and that I should write to this person myself. The man of influence was Professor Potekhin, a Soviet scholar and expert on Africa, of whom I was to hear a lot more both in London and in Moscow. I did eventually get a reply to my letters from London to Professor Potekhin. But all he told me then was that the Soviet Minister of Higher Education would contact me by letter. When I at last received this impatiently awaited letter it merely repeated what the Embassy had told me: "Apply through your own Government". All this was my first lesson in dealing with Soviet officialdom.

Eventually I decided to go to Russia under my own steam. It was already high summer and I had not much time if I was to make the first term of the academic year starting in October. I determined to scrape up enough money for the fare to Moscow. I took a job as a porter. I worked really hard. At last I was able to write and tell Professor Potekhin I was coming out on my own accord. Somewhat apprehensively I applied to the Soviet Embassy through a travel agency for a visa. I thought there would be endless delays again, especially as my passport was not strictly valid for the Soviet Union. To my surprise there was no delay. In fact my restricted passport only seemed to hasten the Soviet

visa. When I discussed this afterwards with friends who had been in a similar position, they told me they had experienced the same thing. The Soviet authorities seemed to prefer you to have a passport that is not quite in order. Certainly they never worried me or pointed out I might have trouble with such a passport. Again I was to learn later that this was intentional policy on the part of the Soviet authorities. Now the Russians seemed only too keen to have me.

Here I was then aboard the *Baltika*, the ship in which almost a year later Khrushchev and the other East European Communist leaders sailed off to "conquer" the United Nations Organisation. My troubles seemed to be over. The treatment I received on board the *Baltika* almost from the moment I embarked seemed at first to make up for all the frustrations of the past months. The captain of the ship himself singled me out for special attention. He invited me to the captain's bridge and showed me the radar screen in operation. It was only when some Italian and Danish friends I had made on board asked to go on the bridge too and were refused that I began to wonder—particularly when the captain denied point blank to them that he had ever shown me round the bridge.

When I went to remonstrate with him that this made me out to be a liar, he mumbled something about having to be careful of spies. Another of the many occasions when I found myself to be the object of favouritism and which sticks in my mind, was when some of my fellow passengers started to play their own records on the radiogram in the lounge. We all wanted to dance. But because the records were English and American they were forbidden and the radiogram put out of action. I remember being particularly struck that some Czechoslovak and Rumanian passengers had a lot of English records and were not allowed to play them. The other passengers, who noticed the way I was being treated, asked me to intercede with the ship's officers. I did. From then on the radiogram played anything, every night.

By this time I was beginning to feel uncomfortable from all this flattery, which had a touch of condescension in it, too. I began to feel that this was racial discrimination, but, as it were, in reverse. It was all being done so obviously that the suspicion even flashed across my mind that the Russians were trying to disarm me before arresting me on my arrival because of my irregular passport. The favouritism displayed to me became particularly embarrassing when we stopped at a port like Stockholm and disembarked for a few hours. On these occasions we had to hand our passports in to the purser. When we returned I was always handed my passport back first, even though there were long queues of people waiting for theirs ahead of me.

When we docked in Leningrad the captain invited me specially to come forward and introduced me, before any of the other passengers, to the Soviet Intourist Travel Aegncy official who had come to

meet all the passengers. The Intourist official promptly offered me a free flight by air to Moscow. I declined, saying I preferred to go with my friends. By this time I was more than a little suspicious of all this laboured "VIP" treatment. But further surprises awaited me on my arrival at the Leningrad Station in Moscow.

I ENROL AT MOSCOW UNIVERSITY

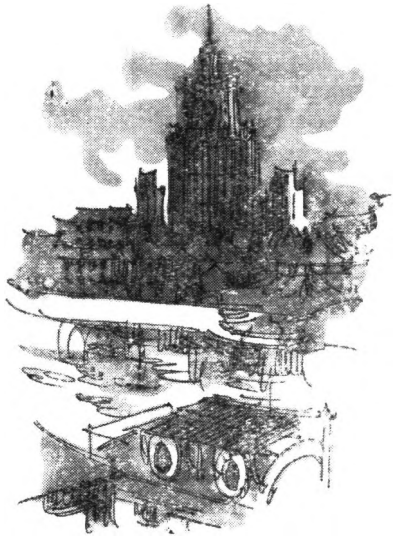
I CONFESS I was slightly peeved to find there was no one to meet us or direct us when we arrived at the Leningrad Station in Moscow. On board ship, outside the Soviet Union, I had been treated like a visiting President. Though that had become embarrassing and distasteful, this sudden let-down from the sublime to the ridiculous was not pleasant either.

After a lot of telephoning an official of the Intourist travel agency arrived and took us off to the Peking Hotel in Moscow. There I was pressed to take an Intourist "guide", but I said that now that I was here I preferred to find my own way.

My first quarry was Professor Potekhin. I took a taxi to the so-called Friendship House (*Dom Druzhby*). Here the Professor holds his little court. It is situated in Kalinin Street, not far north of the Kremlin. Friendship House is an unattractive building from the outside and conveys no more charm inside. But it would not be exaggerating to describe it as one of the headquarters of Moscow's ideological and propaganda operations in the less-developed countries, and particularly in Africa.

The first thing that struck me were the rows of photographs along the staircases and corridors showing happy-looking African students enjoying themselves. I was very impressed. I later asked a friend whether these were taken in Africa or in Moscow. He told me they were taken in Moscow and added I would see for myself how it was done. His words came back to me vividly not many months afterwards.

Professor Potekhin was not there, I was told on my first visit. Nor did anybody know his home address or his telephone number, so his secretaries informed me. I thought then I had better make straight for the University. I made my way there with a Somali boy who had also just come from London. Our reception was not exactly welcoming. We told the lady receptionist we wanted to contact a friend, Mr. Omor Okullo of Uganda. She told us we had no passes (*propuski*, as they are called in Russian). She could not let us in at all. We asked her to contact Mr. Okullo by telephone, but she refused. It was two hours before a student from the United Arab Republic happened to see us and telephoned Okullo's room on our behalf. When we found Okullo was not in, the UAR student directed us to the Russian Language Institute, a 30-minute bus ride away, where, as we discovered afterwards, most of the African students in Moscow live. Here again we were forbidden entry because we had no *propuski*.



The following day the African students at the Institute sent a delegation to the Ministry of Higher Education to ask for scholarships on our behalf. The delegation was led by Messrs. A. M. Omer and M. A. Dunkaal,

two Somali students. From their subsequent history I realised why these two regarded themselves as having considerable influence with the Soviet authorities. They were among the first of several students whom the Russians paid to denounce Mr. Okullo, after the latter had left Russia and had written about his experiences in Moscow.

The Somali student who had come out from England at the same time as myself did in fact succeed in getting a scholarship from the Ministry straight away. But he had been a member of the Young Communist League in Liverpool. His YCL membership card, together with the representations of the student delegation, had opened the doors of Moscow University for him. Not long after, the scholarship was revoked on the grounds that his educational qualifications were not up to the required level. In fact he had to make way for a student direct from Africa, because the Soviet authorities always give preference to those who have had no experience of other Western countries.

As for me, I had certainly not met with the initial success my friend had. I had gone again to Friendship House. Here I was received by Professor Potekhin's chief secretary, a Mr. Schmelkov-Pavet, and by the Professor's interpreter, Marina Right (*sic*), a woman of considerable influence, as I discovered later. They explained to me that there were three main types of scholarship : those awarded by the Ministry for Higher Education, which were in fact those supposed to be given through the United Nations, for which I had already applied ; then there were the scholarships awarded by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee ; and finally those from Friendship House itself. No mention was made to me then of the IUS scholarships. The latter, like

the UNO scholarships, are on the whole awarded from outside Russia. The Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and Friendship House give scholarships at their discretion both inside and outside the Soviet Union. A favourite recruiting ground for these scholarships are the Communist organised Youth Festivals, as my friends who had been recruited this way described to me.

For the time being Friendship House did not award me a scholarship, though the secretary and Madame Right said they would consider it.

On the following day I again failed to see Professor Potekhin, though this time I had come at his request. Instead I was sent off to the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. This is a little distance away to the west of Friendship House, in the Kropotkinskaya district. Several African and Asian students from the University are employed there. I was taken to the Soviet director, Vladimir Shtykov, who promptly told me he did not know why "my case" had been referred to him, and that he could do nothing. I should go, he said, to the Ministry for Higher Education. By this time I was beginning to feel like the proverbial buck—being passed to everybody else but the person I was dealing with.

I returned to my hotel and as a last resort telephoned Professor Potekhin. This time I was lucky. Less than two hours after speaking to Potekhin I was on my way in a taxi with an escort to Moscow University, as I thought. Instead I was taken on to the Russian Language Institute. This lies to the north-west of the main University, at a distance, as I have already mentioned, of about a 30-minute bus drive. Its address is Cheremushkinskaya Street, No. 24-35, and hence the students often refer to the Institute simply as Cheremushkinskaya.

When I arrived at the Institute I was given a temporary *propusk*. Later, I was told, in addition to a University *propusk*, I would be given a Russian internal passport. I received this in about three weeks' time. But I noticed it was endorsed "Foreign Student"—and gave my nationality. The most extraordinary thing that struck me was that on being accepted into the University I was not asked to fill in any kind of form. In fact during the whole of my stay I was never asked to register in writing as a member of the University. The guide who had taken me to the Institute turned out to be none other than the Institute's Director of Accommodation. In addition, no doubt, one or two telephone calls were sufficient to vouch for me. As for money, I was told I would get some in a couple of days. Meanwhile, if I needed any, I was instructed that I should borrow from friends.

My scholarship, which I received in due course, was worth 900 roubles. This is the same for all undergraduate scholarships, whatever the channels through which they are obtained. Only postgraduate ones are worth more, sometimes as much as double this amount. When I first received my monthly allowance I noticed there had been a deduction. I had never been told anything about this by the Soviet authorities before, but was now informed that a deduction of 20 roubles per month was made for accommodation. I knew, of course, that this was in direct contradiction to the advertised announcements which the Soviet authorities put out about the scholarships, for example, in the United Nations handbooks. The deduction might seem small, but out of what was left, we had to provide a great deal : in the first place there was, for most students, after the first month or two, almost daily travel to the

University. This would cost us up to 10 roubles per week. None of our meals, nor text-books, nor writing materials were provided free. For all this we paid, including the travelling, some 660 roubles a month, the main item being meals. Then there was another 50 roubles or so for laundry, and on top of that incidentals like soap and toothpaste, each of which cost about 2 roubles. The generous scholarship, which I had dreamed of in London, soon dwindled to its proper proportions. It is true that after a long time I received a single allowance of 3,000 roubles to buy winter clothing, but this did not go far in the face of the high Russian prices for clothes. Another disappointment for the students this year was the abolition of the 2,000 roubles pocket-money provided to those who agreed to go on a guided summer holiday-tour. But if we were nothing like as well off as we imagined before coming to Moscow, we certainly fared much better than our Russian fellow-students, who got only a third of our allowances. Naturally they felt some resentment over this.

The accommodation that we paid for was hardly palatial. The rooms were cramped, usually dirty,

and there was little chance of privacy, as I shall describe later.

When I was first shown up to my room, which was on the third floor, I was somewhat surprised to see two Russian students already installed there. found out later that, with few exceptions, every single dormitory room in the Institute has at least two Russians in it. One of the Russians was frequently in the uniform of the army, or State security police. It did not take me long to find out from my fellow African students and from my own experience, the rôle that our Russian room-mates played. A few days later another African student, from the former French Cameroun, was also put in the room. For the next year this was where I lived, with two Russians and one other African in a not very large room on the third floor of the Institute

I WAS KHRUSHCHEV'S "NEIGHBOUR"

THE RUSSIAN Language Institute, in Cheremushkinskaya Street, is a very ordinary, somewhat barrack-like building forming part of a street block. The Institute itself occupies three floors of the block. It takes you about half an hour to get to it from the University, or 20 minutes by tram, which takes a more direct route. Your journey, for which as a foreign student you have to pay full fare—there are no concessions as there are for students in other countries—your journey takes you not very far past Prime Minister Khrushchev's house—a fact which if you are an African student has quite a curious bearing on your life. Not that the Institute is in the same sort of pleasant surroundings as Mr. Khrushchev's house is. He lives a pleasantly short distance from the Moskva River, rather to the north of the University and the Lenin Hills. The significant thing about the Institute being the not too distant neighbour of the Khrushchev residence—it is only 10 minutes' walk away—is that it lies on Mr. Khrushchev's route home from the Vnukovo Airport. So whenever Mr. Khrushchev returns from one of his "triumphal" tours abroad, the inmates of the Institute are hustled out to meet him. But there is more to it than just that.

I was twice one of the not very willing or enthusiastic participants, together with my fellow African students, on one of these festive occasions to greet the returning hero. The first time was in the spring of 1960 on Mr. Khrushchev's return from

his tour of South-East Asian countries, and the second occasion was not many weeks later on his return from Paris.

What happened was this : barely one hour before Mr. Khrushchev was due to pass in the nearby streets all the students in the Institute building were rounded up and summoned to the Director of the Institute. The Director told us that all students *must*—the Russian word he used each time was *dolzhny*, an imperative which means it is an order—all students *must*, he announced, go to the Lenin Parade (*Leninskiy Prospekt*) to greet Mr. Khrushchev on his safe arrival home. It was hardly a tactful invitation and we students resented the tone, particularly after his tour to France, which had been given us as the reason for forbidding us to hold our protest march against the French Sahara atomic bomb tests.

It was understandable, then, that we were not exactly an inspiring audience. But this did not deter Mr. Khrushchev at all. He loves to play up to a non-white audience, and when he saw us black African students he rose exultantly in his motor-car, clasped his fists above his head and gestured towards us with a kind of boxer's signal of triumph. It all made a pretty

picture for the Soviet Press photographers, and, of course, we African students were not so naïve as not to realise why this was staged. Incidentally, I had another similar encounter with Mr. Khrushchev at the May Day Parade a month or so later. I happened to be the only African on a particular section of the parade. Mr. Khrushchev's quick eye spotted me and he did his boxer's salute again, laughing and gesticulating. Of course, the photographers' flash-bulbs exploded into action once more.

So much for our powerful neighbour, whose near presence, unfortunately, did nothing to alleviate the bad conditions inside the Institute. We were housed, as I have mentioned, on three floors of the Institute building. On the first floor were African and Asian students, though there were only a few of the latter, mainly from Indonesia and Malaya ; the second floor was occupied by Africans and the third floor was devoted to Iraqi students, who outnumbered those of any other foreign nationality at the University. I and the student from the Cameroun were put on the third floor only because we were late arrivals. Afterwards the authorities tried to move me to the second floor ; but I had made friends on the third and only after a considerable struggle was I allowed to stay.

Four students share one room. But the most important thing is that in each room, except in those of the Iraqis, there were two Russian students. Even in most of the Iraqis' rooms there was at least one Russian. To make it less obvious, these Russians were always installed before any foreign students took up residence in a room. Often, but not always, at least one of the two Russians in a room quite openly wore an army or State security police uniform. There were normally two of these

uniformed students on each floor. It was the first time I had ever slept in the same room as a policeman, for this was indeed the rôle that the Russian students played in our rooms. Soon after my arrival, while I was still very much a freshman, I asked the Soviet administrators of the Institute what the students in uniform were doing there. The reply I was given was that they were nothing to do with the University, but simply lodged with us because of lack of accommodation elsewhere. When I recalled this answer later I found it distinctly odd that these uniformed students took part in many University functions, though they were supposed not to be members of the University.

But in my early days there I was even more astounded when I saw large numbers of the ordinary civil police, militia as they are called in Russia, walking about the main University buildings, and at first I could hardly believe it when I was told they lived there. Of these I shall have more to say later. The official reason we were given for the presence of Russian students in our rooms was that they would help us to learn Russian more quickly.

The largest contingent of black Africans (that is, of Africans from south of the Sahara) at Moscow University while I was there was the Guinean, of whom there were some 30 to 40. They told me there were about another 35 of them in Tashkent University, in Soviet Central Asia. While most of us Africans were, one might say, segregated in the Institute, there were a few Africans in the main

University building. In addition to the Africans, the other foreign students in the main building were mainly Asians, a few Europeans and a few Americans, including Latin Americans. In the case of all of these and of the Africans, the reason they were in the main building was either that they were post-graduates or were UNO scholarship holders.

The Chinese students were a case apart. All of them were housed in the superior accommodation of the main building, whether they knew Russian or not, or whether they were graduates or undergraduates. They lived in a separate sector of the University. Their lectures in the Russian language were given to them separately in the main building and not in the Russian Language Institute. At student meetings they were used to swell the Russian votes, as they always voted for the official Russian policies. Many if not all of them were made honorary members of the Young Communist League (*Komsomol*), a doubtful distinction which was not conferred on other foreign students normally. How long this "most favoured nation" treatment of the Chinese will go on is a moot point. In any case we never saw much of the Chinese and I certainly never saw a single one at the Friendship House up in the City. On the rare occasions they attended official functions, the Russians appeared to be keeping them in the background.

None of us had any doubt that the accommodation in the main building was superior to ours. In the first place each student there had a room or at least a partitioned section of an apartment to himself. We could have no privacy. Our Russian roommates in particular were always interrupting, often rudely, especially when we had any friends in. When we tried to work, the Russians seemed to

come and interfere intentionally. The already dirty rooms were made more unsavoury by the Russians' habit of leaving the remnants of their meals in the rooms. They were not altogether to blame for having to eat in the rooms. Their scholarship grants were so small that they had to resort to scrap meals in the rooms ; though of course in many cases, unlike us, they could fall back on their homes and families. But this did not make the atmosphere any easier for us. The Soviet Embassy in Cairo had promised our "Uganda Foreign Office" in Cairo that our students would have facilities for calm and private political work. This certainly did not work out. Finally, and perhaps one of the most important disadvantages for us Africans who come from a hot climate, the rooms were cold in winter. In fact several African students obtained transfers to the main building on medical grounds, until the Soviet authorities became suspicious and stopped such moves.

I found conditions to be so sordid and such a handicap to work, after what I had been accustomed to in my own and other countries, that early on I asked the Assistant Rector of the University, Comrade Ivanov, as he was known, for a transfer to the main building. I made the request not only for myself but on behalf of my fellow students from Uganda. Comrade Ivanov immediately

demanded, "Are you Communists?" I asked him what that had to do with it. His reply was that it would help solve our problem of accommodation if we were.

Another major grievance that we inmates of the Institute's hostel for Africans had was that we were not allowed to invite visitors from outside. But in December it was suddenly announced on the notice board that we would be permitted visitors for two hours only, once a week, on Sundays. The notice made no mention of the sex of the visitors allowed. But when a Guinean student invited a Russian girl to visit the Institute, he was stopped as he was bringing her in and told this was forbidden. We complained in a body to the Institute's Director against such discrimination—for the students at the University main building were allowed two visitors of either sex every Saturday and Sunday until 11.30 p.m. The Director's answer to us was simply, "We will have nothing of that sort here !" (in Russian *U nas tak ne budet*).

It is hardly surprising that we Africans felt almost as though we were in a ghetto. And when the Soviet authorities announced, with much propaganda, at the beginning of 1960 that they were going to open a so-called People's Friendship University, which would be completely separate from Moscow University, we were disgusted. I often talked about it with my fellow African students. We all realised that this would mean even further segregation of foreign, and especially African and Asian, students. It was an added insult to our countries. If the Russians really wanted to help us they should help us build universities in our own country, we thought. I am convinced that is still the feeling of the majority of the 90-100 African students still left in Moscow.

THE STUDENT POLICEMEN

THE SYSTEM of controls over all students in Moscow University is pretty formidable and is getting stricter every year. Lectures are, of course, compulsory, which perhaps no student should complain about. But it is the restrictions on his personal freedom that are irksome. I have mentioned already the uniformed civil police, or militia, who live openly in the main University building and are a visible and ever-present source of irritation. Two of these militiamen, or policemen, live on each floor. There are six sectors (*zony*, as the Russians call them) in the main building, and most sectors have nine floors. That means there are no less than 100 policemen, and there may well be more altogether, permanently living in, and watching the occupants of, the University. But they are of course only the outward signs of authority. All students also suffer from the Komsomol activists and the informers.

But if all students suffer from these pests, the foreign non-Russian students suffer far more, and we African students, in our Institute ghetto, perhaps most of all. Under the system of University passes, or *propuski*, all who live in the Institute are discriminated against. To make this quite clear I should explain that the main University building is divided up, as I have mentioned, into sectors, each of which is referred to by the Russians as a *zona*, and that before you can pass from one sector to another you must show your *propusk* to a woman

administrator who sits at the door of the sector, and whose whole-time job it is to check the *propuski*. If you live in the University your *propusk* carries a special endorsement which allows you to move freely from one sector to another at any time of day. If you are merely an Institute student you cannot pass from one sector to another after 10 p.m., nor can you enter the University buildings after that time, though, if you are already in, you may stay till midnight.

It was the same with visitors, as I have already mentioned. Those who lived in the University were allowed two guests of either sex, on Saturdays and Sundays. We were allowed none in practice. Of course, we had good friends in the main building, both Russian and foreign students, and they allowed us to invite guests to their rooms on their *propuski*. All this, too, may not seem such a hardship, but the point is that we adult, and I hope responsible, students, should not have been compelled to resort to such subterfuges. Moreover, as I shall mention later, the inquisitiveness and interference of the Komsomol activists detracted seriously from the pleasure of our small parties with our friends and guests in the University.

Undoubtedly, however, the worst interference and unpleasantness we had to endure was from the Russian students who were installed in our rooms. That they were put there primarily to spy on us, none of us had or have any doubts. They were in fact nothing more or less than "student" secret police. On at least one occasion while I was there they were even used by the Soviet authorities to enforce discipline and make physical arrests. But let me tell you a few concrete examples of their activities.

Perhaps the commonest irritation we suffered from them was their habit of breaking into rooms when we had our friends in from other parts of the Institute, and sometimes even demanding to know what we were talking about. But one day I was quite alone in my room quietly reading a book. It happened to be an abridged version of Sir Anthony Eden's memoirs. A Russian student came in. He wanted to know what the book was. Was it a novel or a political book? Could one get it here in Moscow? I told him I had bought it in London. Could he borrow it? I said he could after I had finished, though I knew he did not read English freely. The Institute Secretary was his friend and he was sure, he said, that she would like to read it. She could have it after I had finished with it. Oh! but she was going on holiday soon. By now, of course, I realised what all this was about. After he left I put the book in my locker. By the way, none of our lockers were provided with locks, nor were we allowed to fix them on.

Two days later my book had disappeared. I confronted the Russian directly, but he denied having taken it. After another three days the book miraculously returned to my locker. I happened to meet the Secretary a few days later. She told me her friend had mentioned the book to her and asked casually if I had got it back yet. She too asked if one could get it here and requested me to get a copy for her. I told her to try for herself at the British Embassy. She replied that surely I knew it was dangerous for Soviet citizens to go there. All this, I realised, was an attempt to provoke me into compromising myself, and was done to try me out.

Another even more shocking instance of Russian student spying occurred to a student friend of mine

from Uganda. He was reading some mail and looking at some family photographs in an album, including one of his fiancée. A Russian student observed this and a few days later his album disappeared from his locker. It was returned a few days later with rude remarks scribbled over the photographs. The one of his fiancée carried the inscription : "This girl looks like an animal. She's not fit to be your girl friend". We could not believe that the Russian authorities would approve of this, though it may have been a way of breaking our morale and trying to prevent us thinking too much about home. In any case we complained to the Director of Accommodation in the Institute. We were able to tell him that one of our African students had seen a Russian student returning the album to the locker. But as far as we know no action was taken against the perpetrators of the incident, who might have regarded it as part of their duty to remove the album for examination by the authorities.

Then there was the time the Russians, with the assistance of the uniformed State security students, arrested a Somali student. I would not say that this student was exactly a model one or a paragon of virtue, and this night he had certainly been drinking and on returning to his room had become argumentative. The Russian students started beating him up. Other African students came to try to

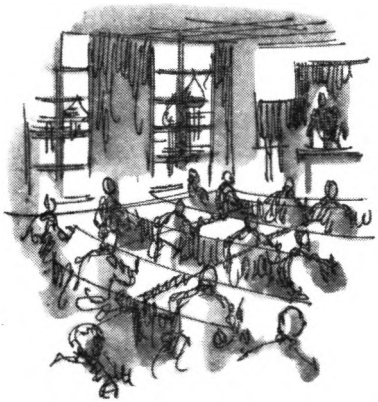
separate them. The Russians then threatened they would call the Iraqis to come and fight the Africans, and in fact did so. The next day the Director of the Institute ordered the uniformed students to arrest the Somali boy. We African students intervened, saying, "This is nothing to do with you policemen". I was in the delegation that went to protest to the Director. We asked him whether the policemen were students of the Institute or simply Army people using our accommodation. In any case it seemed to us they had no right to interfere in a matter of discipline against a fellow student, particularly if they were not really part of the Institute. The Director replied that it did not matter what they were—he had ordered them to help.

Yet another particularly odious form of restricting our liberty was also effected partly through the agency of the Russian student spies. We often tried to listen to Western radio stations, especially to the *Voice of America* for music, which many Russian students who were our good friends also liked to hear, and to the BBC for news. Some of us had our own radio sets. If we had Russian friends in the room they would often break into dancing—they really enjoyed it. But the Russian student police, both those in and out of uniform, used to snoop round the rooms and as soon as they heard us listening to foreign stations they would go and inform the "Commandant" of the Institute. We would then suddenly find the lights going out and the electric power being cut off, so putting the radios out of action.

Even when jamming of foreign stations was lifted in the period before the Summit Conference, these arbitrary power cuts were imposed, particularly at the best listening times, so as to make it impossible

for us to use our radios. The best time for listening is often late at night. Officially lights out in the Institute was at 2 a.m., but whenever any radio was heard after midnight, the lights and power were extinguished. Here again the Africans and other students at the Institute were the victims of discrimination, because the main University buildings did not suffer from such arbitrary power cuts, or at least not to anything like the same extent.

The Russian student police, by which I mean all the Russian students who were put in to spy on us, used to plan their strategy and tactics at meetings held in complete secrecy. No Africans or even Iraqis, whom the Russians sometimes used against the Africans, were ever allowed at these meetings. Officially no students' unions were allowed outside the Komsomol (the Young Communist League), but our student policemen were meeting as a student body. One of them gave the game away to me when I had an argument with him and he blurted out that I had to obey him because he was head of the room. I asked him, "By what authority?" He replied he had been appointed to the position by the Russian Students' Association. I told him I had never heard of it, but if that were so I had been appointed by the Black African Students' Union (BASU). It was a particularly sore point with us that the Russian



authorities bluntly and absolutely refused to recognise the BASU, which we had formed in Moscow absolutely constitutionally. Even Professor Potekhin firmly refused to address the BASU as such in any official communication, though he would use its functions as a platform for political pronouncements.

The Russian students got away with it, in theory, by stating that their body in the Institute was simply a branch of the Komsomol organisation of the University. In fact, however, we knew that at least some of the Russians in the Institute had been suspended from the Komsomol and removed from the University main building for minor misdemeanours. They had been put into the Institute to watch over us and to redeem themselves with the authorities, if they could, by their zealousness in spying on us.

The Komsomol organisation did, of course, exist in the University. Indeed they were made into a kind of *corps d'élite*. A good Komsomol could, if he pleased the authorities, get more money on his scholarship. We noticed in particular at dances and other social functions that the Komsomols could afford to be better dressed. By their zeal they could supplement their income by a couple of hundred roubles a month. No foreign students, except the Chinese, could normally be Komsomol members. What do they have to do to be "good Komsomols"? Well, they certainly have to report on and be partly responsible for the behaviour of all their fellow students. But they impinged on the lives of us foreign students in particular, and in one very unpleasant way.

If we managed to invite some Russian friends to the University, to the room of one of our fellow-students who lived there, we could be sure of a

visit from at least one Komsomol activist. They would simply "barge" into the room and listen and join in the conversation without so much as a by-your-leave. They would be particularly assiduous if there were Russian girls present as guests. In that case they would try to befriend our guests and even invite them to their rooms. Only when this bad-mannered behaviour led to protests, even from other Russian students, would they desist from these tactics. They then resorted to another method of preventing Russians, and especially Russian girls, from keeping up their friendships with us. Every guest who comes into the University is compelled to surrender his or her internal passport, which every Russian is compelled to carry, to the office on the ground floor. They then have to declare whom they are visiting and receive a pass for that room. The Komsomols task was easy. They simply went to the office, got the details of the visitors from their passports and either accosted them on their way out, or simply wrote a letter to their factory or their house warden.

This is what happened to me and my friends one Sunday evening. We had some guests in a room in the main building. It was after 11.30 p.m., the zero hour by which all guests must leave, but we did not notice the time. Soon there was a knock on the door. A Komsomol activist asked why we still had guests. We said we were just finishing our drinks. He let us finish the drinks. But as our guests left the building the Komsomol accosted them, and then began a regular interrogation of the Russian girl who had been among the guests. She was not allowed to have her passport until the next morning, when she was again interrogated. We later learned that her house warden had received a poison-pen

letter from the University Komsomol, blackening and slandering her personal character and demanding she should be stopped from meeting African students. Such were the indignities to which we were subjected.

Can you wonder that I was particularly incensed by this further incident which I would like to relate in conclusion. My friends and I in the Institute, all fellow-students, were one day sitting in one of our rooms in the Institute playing some dance-music records. Suddenly the door burst open and one of the Russian student police came in and without any kind of permission started taking photographs of our group. We asked him why he wanted to photograph us. He replied that he wanted to show his friends how happy we were. At that moment an image of the photographs of happy African students strung along the corridors of Professor Potekhin's Friendship House, and of the thousands of similar photographs in Soviet propaganda publications, flashed through my mind's eye. I realised the use to which the student policeman's photographs of our group would be put. I did not want our innocent recreation to be prostituted in that way. I demanded he should give up the film. He refused. It now became a matter of

principle for me. I went to the Director. I took the opportunity to tell him I was not happy with our Russian room-mates. They never seemed to do anything but stay in our rooms. I said I could not prove it but my African fellow-students and myself felt they had been through our suit-cases. The Director assured me that this was not so. Nevertheless, I demanded the return of the photographs. I said I insisted on having the whole film, before it was developed. The Director refused to take any action. So I boycotted the Institute lectures. For two whole days I did not attend a single lecture. Finally the film was surrendered to me—undeveloped. I had it developed myself privately to check that it was the right film. Neither the Russian student nor the Director had the grace to apologise. On the contrary all that I heard from the Director by way of explanation was that I must be a spy. Otherwise I would not have handled the affair of the photographs with such expert knowledge! Presumably he did not expect me to understand even the simplest facts about developing and printing films.

STUDY AND INDOCTRINATION

IT IS SEVERAL days before the newly-joined freshman at Moscow University is allowed to start lectures or any kind of lessons. Whether this is some kind of tactic aimed at the student's psychology or whether it is simply due to the usual Russian administrative chaos, I could never make out. I have known some new students have to wait as long as a month before they could commence their studies. But once you did start you had to make up for the delays, for the course was intensive.

For the first two or three months, depending on progress, you do nothing but Russian language intensively—four hours a day of lectures, then private study, if you could manage it in the cold, poor and cramped quarters. After this initial period, Russian language lessons were reduced to two hours daily. For the first period all your lectures are given at the Institute. Later, in any case after two months, you study other subjects and attend some lectures in the main building. If you have many lectures there, your Russian lessons are transferred to the Russian classes in the main building.

The Soviet authorities lay great store by the initial period of training. All the Russian language teachers at the Institute in my time were women. But this did not mean that they are not also skilled political propagandists. I was put in a class with all

Iraqis. The first thing I heard the lecturer say to my amazement was : "Forget everything you ever learnt before you came to Russia". We soon realised that this meant, in particular, anything we had learnt in a Western "capitalist" country. The reason we were given for this somewhat startling injunction was that since Russian was such a difficult language, we must learn to think the way Russians do, right from the very start, on a clean slate, as it were. Of course, we were told, you will not be able to do that at first, but you should pretend to do so, to put you in the right frame of mind. On the face of it, this seems good advice for learning a language, and, indeed, I can certainly vouch for it myself that it does work quite well. But, if you think about it more deeply you realise that it is a somewhat gratuitous insult to your intelligence to demand that you should forget everything that you have learnt, particularly when it is implied, as our Russian teachers did, that what we had learnt even in our own native countries was hardly worth knowing, and in any case inferior to the knowledge that Soviet Russia had to impart.

At any rate it did not take long for us Africans, or even for the Iraqi students who were often inclined to accept uncritically what the Russians said, to understand the plan behind the method. At first we were told, or had to read, simple stories in Russian about Russian historical and revolutionary leaders and heroes. The teachers would sketch in the background of the simple sentences, then they would compare this background with conditions in your own country, and of course, would make sure there were many parallels. They would then ask us if we did not wish that our countries had some revolutionary leaders and heroes

In this way we were forced to express an opinion whether we wanted to or not. Yes, it is as simple and as crude as that.

This method was used not merely to indoctrinate and mould our way of thinking but to find out our existing thoughts and leanings. If any of us started to disagree with or question some of the propositions put by the teacher, she would soon start complaining that you were wasting the class's time and that you had better go to another class. In this way students were sorted out into different categories according to the stages of their political, rather than their academic, abilities. When I compared notes with my friends who had been longer in the Institute, they told me that exactly the same tactics had been used in their classes. The teachers would be careful not to go too fast, but would let out little bits of political lessons at a time, testing the reactions of all the students in the class until they had them sorted out. When it dawned on me what it was all about, I pretended to play dumb, and when I was asked a leading and provocative question I would reply, "I don't know. I know very little of the history of my country".

After a month a new tactic is employed against the students. We are told that now we are going to expand our vocabulary, we are going to use words in common contemporary language. For this purpose we are given passages carefully selected from the daily newspaper. The object of this exercise is no longer to pass opinions about our own countries but to pass judgment on the form of condemnations of so-called "capitalist" countries.

One of the Russian language teachers had a particularly subtle approach. Her name was Valeria Dmitrievna. She would be very outspoken with us

and would frankly tell us that the aim of these classes was to indoctrinate us, and that she personally did not agree with all this. We students realised after a bit that she was doing this simply to gain our confidence. At the same time she would also try to win our sympathy by saying that the British, French and Americans do not want Africans to be free or educated. But all the Soviet people, including herself, wanted to help Africans. Unfortunately, Valeria Dmitrievna rather spoilt the effect on other occasions by proclaiming that the African students who came to Moscow were those who were unable to get into Western universities, implying that this was due to a lack of intelligence, but that the Soviet system of education could cope with that. It was hardly flattering to some of us students who had already reached a higher standard in other subjects than we were being taught here at first.

In fact many of the foreign students, and particularly my fellow Africans and myself, became convinced that the Russians were not really anxious that we should learn a lot, but only a little of what they thought was the right thing for us. We got this impression from the fact that the Russian lecturers would go on repeating the same topic and the same lesson for days on end, and then yet again later. They told us they did this so that we should have a thorough grasp of the subject and would not need to refer to text-books when we came to teach our fellow-countrymen or others. This is, of course, true, and in a sense the method works very

well, but it is limiting. The political implications of the system are obvious, too.

At the same time I myself witnessed at least two instances of Russian lecturers deliberately withholding information, and my friends told me of other cases. Some students would ask question which required a serious and comparatively advanced answer. We were always told the problem would be dealt with in another class, but we never got the answers. On other occasions Russian lecturers would bluntly state that the answers to some questions were a State secret. This frequently happened to foreign students in advanced physics and chemistry lectures. I remember an African student in my class of a physics lecture asking some question about the application of Newton's Third Law to the development of rocket sciences. The lecturer said he was not prepared to go into details because it was a secret. He thereupon defended his attitude by delivering us a lecture on the wickedness of the U-2 flights. Well, we all thought, this may be the cold war but it is hardly magnificent, nor is it in best traditions of academic enquiry in the free world.

While I was in Moscow there were not many cases of African students being prevented from studying what subjects they wished, if they were really determined to do so and if they threatened to leave unless they did. On the other hand the normal system is for the Soviet authorities to choose the subject of a student's further study in accordance with what *they* consider the student's country needs. This may not agree with the ideas or estimates of the student's own country, but this is not usually taken into account by the Russians. International law is one subject that is absolutely banned to all foreign students, except possibly to specially selected

ones whom the Russians believe they can trust. This is a subject which the Russians think might reveal too much about their international political strategy.

If students, even in all innocence, ask questions of the lecturers which prove to be embarrassing or are considered by the lecturers to be subversive, the students can get into serious trouble. I think I can best illustrate this by my own experience. The lecture, as far as I recall, was on "What is Communism ?" and the stock axiom was given to us to analyse : "Communism equals Soviet Power plus Electrification". That, said the lecturer, was progress. "Would you not like to see such progress in your countries ?" he asked. While I agreed that my country was not yet independent, I asked, "Could not our African countries have their revolution simply in the form of electrification *without* Soviet power ? Is it essential, in other words, that we copy the Soviet system of government ?" The lecturer did not attempt to answer my question, but promptly informed the Director of my Institute, who later summoned me to his presence and said : "You have asked a question you should not have asked !" I told him I genuinely wanted to know the answer. Could we have electrification, but some other kind of political system than the Soviet ? The Director's reply was, "It will never be so". (In Russian : *Tak ne budet.*) And he went on to tell me that if I continued to ask such questions, the Soviet authorities would be forced to conclude I did not want to study in Moscow any more.

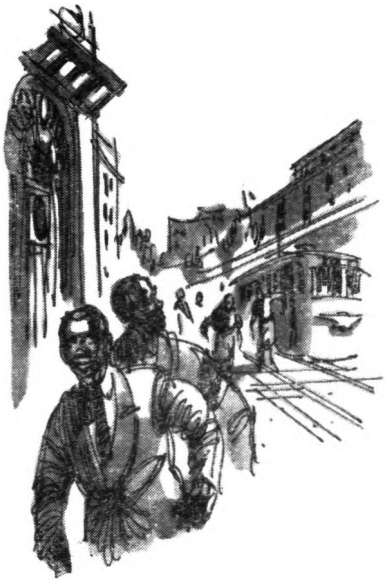
My unfortunate question was marked down against me in the Soviet dossiers. When I was a member of the delegation which went to the Soviet Minister of Higher Education to protest against

the expulsion from Moscow University of Mr. Omor Okullo, a graduate student from my own country of Uganda, the Russian Minister remarked that many other students might have to be expelled besides Okullo, and pointedly facing me, added, "For example, students who ask questions about countries having electrification without Soviet power". More ominously the Minister went on to accuse African, and in particular Uganda students, of acting as "spies for the West". When we asked what proof he had of such monstrous allegations, he brusquely snapped back, "That is our business". (In Russian : *Eto nashe delo.*) And so, we reflected as we left the Minister, are the thoughts of your students.

AFRICANS AGAINST AFRICANS

RUSSIANS love you to love them. But they seem to hate other people to love each other. The clearest proof we had that the Russians were not at all keen for Africans to get together was the persistent refusal of the Soviet authorities to recognise our Black African Students' Union in Moscow. The President of our Union was Mr. Sou of Guinea and the Secretary was Mr. Ilengesa Peri of the Congo. We really felt we had an organisation truly representing the interests of African students from south of the Sahara. At the same time our relations with the students of the United Arab Republic were of the friendliest, and we got on extremely well with the Algerians and Moroccans. We were by no means on unfriendly terms with the Iraqi students. Unfortunately the Russians seemed to regard the Iraqis as their stooges and trouble-shooters, and called them in whenever there was any dirty work to be done against the African students. An occasion I well remember was when a friend of mine, an African, had quarrelled with a Russian student over a girl. A Komsomol official approached an Iraqi student to give evidence against the African. As a result the African was turned out of his room in the University and sent back to the Institute, where he had originally had his quarters.

But one of the worst cases of the Russians trying to split the Africans up occurred over the Black African Students' Union. This had been constitutionally formed and had a committee of one representative elected from each of the following countries:



Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Cameroun, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. I represented my country of Uganda on the Black African Students' Union. The Russians did their best to get the Somali and Sudanese students to withdraw from BASU. They used the Iraqis again to try to persuade them to break away. The Somalis and Sudanese come from Arabic-speaking countries, so the Iraqis were told to offer them membership of the Arab League Association in Moscow. Having used this bait, however, the Iraqis, when they had succeeded in getting the Somalis and Sudanese to break away, then refused them permission to join the Arab League Association except on yet another condition. This was that the Somalis and Sudanese should persuade the remaining members of the BASU to join the Arab League Association on the basis of individual countries and make a federation of it. We refused because we could see that this was a manœuvre to liquidate the unity of the BASU.

The Russians used various other tactics to break up the BASU and set its members against each other. At one time the chairman of the Institute proposed that there should be a kind of unofficial Students' Union for the Institute. This would be

composed of the BASU members, plus representatives of the Latin American, Iraqi and Russian students in the Institute. However, we discovered, after this body had worked for a short while, that all the agendas for the meetings of the new Institute's Students' Union were drawn up and decided upon at the secret meetings held by the Russian students. Then, when the new Union held a session, the Director simply used to present decisions which had already been made and expected the Union merely to approve them. As a result we refused to be parties to this organisation.

Another body which the Russians tried to set up in order to neutralise the BASU was a seminar to advise the Soviet authorities on African affairs. Professor Potekhin was delegated to form this body. He summoned, in the name of the Friendship House, representatives from the BASU, as well as from Algerian and Moroccan students. On this occasion I again represented the Uganda students. Potekhin told us that he wanted to set up a seminar to provide regular reports—he did not specify to whom the report would go—about political, cultural and economic developments in Africa. The seminar would act under the direction of the Friendship House. Potekhin told us we would be given full facilities to collect the information we needed to draw up these reports. The working members of the seminar would not receive any pay.

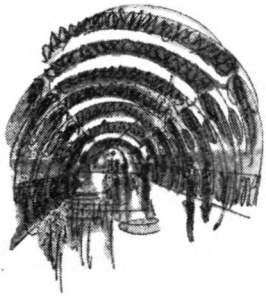
We saw that this seminar would have two objectives. First, to provide a kind of unpaid intelligence agency for the Russians, and secondly, to break up the BASU. Potekhin made it a condition of setting up the seminar that no other African students' organisation should exist in Moscow. He demanded that its officials should be

appointed there and then. We replied that the idea might be a good one but we would have to consult and report to all our fellow members. Evidently, however, Potekhin had already sounded and persuaded the Sudanese and Algerian representatives. These also began to demand that the officials should be appointed on the spot. We refused and this naturally brought us into conflict with the Sudanese and Algerians. We told Potekhin that the BASU might consider the proposal only if he wrote officially to its Secretary. The whole project fizzled out because this demand of ours was one which Potekhin would never meet.

The refusal of the Russians ever to address anything officially in writing to the BASU, and thus imply recognition, was very marked. I remember on one occasion last June that the Friendship House, the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, and Moscow University sent invitations out, but only to individual students asking them to come to a meeting to discuss celebrations for an important "Africa Day". (Incidentally, the Russians were always filling our calendar with variously contrived "Africa Days", to give them an excuse to invite us to parties, where there would be much jollification and they would take photographs of African students in happy mood, in order to use them as propaganda pictures.) We agreed that this day should be celebrated, but suggested that it should be the African students who should organise it, not the Russians, though of course they would be welcome to participate. The Russians said they had already made arrangements, including the printing of invitation cards. This was of course a tactless though perhaps unintended insult to us. The Russians had invited us to discuss arrangements but

had already made most of them themselves. We said that as they had already arranged everything they had better go ahead without us. This again caused differences of opinion between the BASU and one or two Sudanese and Iraqis who had been won over by the Russians.

The Russians would also try to drive wedges between us over political issues. Perhaps the most glaring examples were when the Russians prohibited us from demonstrating against the French Sahara atomic bomb tests at the beginning of this year and again when they tried to persuade us African students to make a written declaration against President Nasser. On the first occasion the Russians, to begin with, gave us moral support and said they would certainly back our protests against the Sahara bomb tests. I was going to act as official photographer during the demonstration and I was therefore one of those summoned to a meeting which the Russians later called to discuss the project. We were flabbergasted when the Russians suddenly announced that we would not be permitted to stage our demonstration. We realised soon afterwards the reason : Khrushchev was going to Paris, and from then on Soviet propaganda was full of the efforts he was going to make to strengthen political and economic relations with France. But at the meeting the Russian representatives said that the reason we could not demonstrate was that some foreign students were against it. They specifically named the Iraqi students and those from the



United Arab Republic as being opposed to the demonstration. We naturally started criticizing and arguing with the Iraqi and UAR delegations, before we realised that the Russians were either lying or that they had somehow forced a few Iraqis and Syrians to say that they were against the demonstration. The meeting broke up in confusion.

The case of the Nasser protest was somewhat similar. When President Nasser showed himself not altogether amenable to Soviet policies, and especially when he took steps against Communists in his own country, Soviet propaganda began to attack him indirectly through international Communist publications and through other Middle East Communist Parties. Last spring the Soviet Government instructed the University authorities to organise the foreign, and especially the African, students to make a declaration of protest against Nasser's policies. As I have already mentioned nearly all the other African students were on very good terms with their fellows from the United Arab Republic, so we refused to do as the Russians bid us. But they tried to cause trouble between us over this issue.

On another, similar occasion the University officials called a meeting of all foreign students to protest against the American U-2 incident last May. In fact very few students attended. But the Russians wanted all the foreign students to sign a document of protest and to send a telegram to the United Nations Organisation. The BASU representative, who on that occasion was our President, Mr. Sou of Guinea, refused. He said he recognised this might be a matter of importance but as the Russians had refused us permission to demonstrate on other occasions we could not even consider the proposal until the Russians recognised our Union. In the second

place, he said, this was a matter between the Soviet Union and the USA. It was not right of the Soviet authorities to try to force us to jeopardise relations between our own African countries and the USA by making us students speak in the name of our countries. Here again the Russians managed to persuade some Somali students to draft a protest telegram to UNO. But because of the obvious opposition of the BASU, the telegram was not sent.

One thing which particularly annoyed us was that the Russians were only too ready to use the BASU as a propaganda platform. I remember one occasion when Professor Potekhin was invited to a party to welcome new African students to the University in November 1959. Even now I, as one of the newcomers, can recall very clearly what the Professor said on that occasion : "The time is not far distant when all African countries will become Communist . . . We Russians are quite sure that this will happen, because if these countries really want to be liberated a revolution must take place in all these countries". Most of us African students who listened to him understood that what he meant was that the present Governments and leaders of our countries would either have to turn Communist or would have to be overthrown by a Communist revolution.

It was made quite obvious to us by Potekhin and by the Russian lecturers on other occasions that Russia wanted to use the African countries against what they called "Western imperialism". But they could only use those countries as a useful tool if they were Communist. The common saying among us African students in Moscow was that Africa might have to endure two more colonialisms : first of all a Communist colonialism and secondly what

we called an internal colonialism, which meant that powerful and large countries inside Africa which had already achieved their independence would try to impose their authority over weaker and younger African States. Nevertheless, this kind of talk from Potekhin disturbed us and caused dissension among us, as it was obviously intended to do.

Another issue over which the Russians caused trouble among us was religion. Quite a few African students at Moscow were Moslems. There were also several Christians, among them at least two Catholics, who were from Uganda. The Moslems naturally wanted to celebrate their important religious festivals, particularly Ramadan. They told the Director of the Institute that they would not be able to attend lectures on the days of the festival. The Director replied that there were no religious festivals recognized in Russia. But the students said that in some of their own countries, for example in the UAR, even the Government does not work on these days ; so how could they, if they were to be loyal to their own countries, violate the festival by working. The Director, very reluctantly, gave in to their demands. But at the same time the Russians would start arguing with the students who were

believers and would try to incite others against them. The Russians would ask why they came to a country where God was not acknowledged if they were believers. They would reply that they came simply as students and that their religious beliefs had nothing to do with it. The Russians would then say that it was the Soviet Government that gave them their scholarships and that it was dishonourable of them to accept those scholarships if they were not prepared to contribute to the ideology of the Soviet State. The Russians were of course very careful never actually to prohibit students, either in writing or by oral declaration, from practising their religion, but their attitude was such that it could not fail to put moral pressure on the believers and to cause bad blood between them and the other students.

The Russians would also try to cause trouble between students on a personal and individual level. The Russian authorities used to employ many selected African and Asian students as paid employees in official organisations. For example, the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in Moscow had several paid employees from the student body. If these proved their loyalty in their work at the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee offices the Russians would train them to be used as agents in their own countries.

Another Soviet agency which made widespread use of African students was *Moscow Radio*. The Africans would be used for their knowledge of their native language. But very often they would disagree and refuse to broadcast the material handed to them by the Russians. Many of these were honest young men and I remember a particular instance when a friend of mine who was employed

by *Moscow Radio*, and who had just been taken on as an announcer in the new Swahili Service of *Moscow Radio*, came to me in considerable distress because he had been asked to broadcast material about the Soviet Union which he knew to be untrue. By selecting students whom they paid and treated with special favour, the Russians created suspicion between them and the others, the more so when it was realised that in many cases the Russians were bribing some of the students to say things against their own fellow Africans. A particular blatant case of this was when *Moscow Radio* and other Soviet propaganda organisations tried to get students to denounce and vilify Mr. Okullo, a graduate student from Uganda who had studied in Moscow University but had been expelled by the Russians on technical grounds and had then published truthful accounts about his experiences in Moscow after he had returned to the free world.

The Russians were too subtle to force students directly to slander Okullo or others who had fallen into their disfavour. What the Russians would do would be to persuade the African students to tell the story of their experiences in Moscow in a very favourable and highly exaggerated form, giving a completely contrary picture to that given, for example, by Mr. Okullo. For this the students were paid by *Moscow Radio* or Soviet newspapers. The Russians would then set these favourable accounts against those given by Mr. Okullo. In this way *Moscow Radio*, for example, would concoct a programme in which it would say other African students had proved Okullo to be a liar by refuting his accounts with a completely contrary picture.

Since leaving Moscow I have heard from other African friends that the Russians were attempting

to bribe African students by direct offers of money to denounce Okullo. They are unlikely to persuade many honest African students to denounce their own fellows, but this would not distress the Russians very much. For their object is not merely to blacken the character of African students who disagree with them but to sow suspicion and mistrust among the Africans left in Moscow in order to keep them weak and disunited.

MEETING THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE

I HAVE already related how closely controlled our movements were inside the University itself. Even to get from one sector of the University to another you have to show your *propusk* about three times on an average. Regulations in the University are getting stricter every year. At one time, for example, female students had their quarters in the same part of the buildings as the male students. A year or two ago they were completely separated. The year before I joined the Russian Language Institute, the hostel of which was described on the passes as "the house of the student" (in Russian, *dom studenta*), female students, so I was told, were also quartered in the same building. After 1959, no female students lived in the Institute.

The movements of foreign students outside the University were in a sense even more restricted. We were, of course, allowed to move about Moscow quite freely. But, like all other foreigners, we were subject to the 20 kilometre limit. This meant that we were not allowed to travel further than 20 kilo-

metres (about 12 miles) outside the centre of Moscow without obtaining special permission from the Soviet authorities. In addition, large areas of the Soviet Union were completely banned to us students just as they were to all other foreigners. In practice, if any student wanted to travel any distance outside Moscow on his own he had to write a special application to the Director, who then informed the appropriate Soviet authorities, that is the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for Internal Affairs. Of course there were the organised holiday tours. But, as several of my friends told me who had been on them, they were very dull.

Students were taken to the regular tourist show places and were never able to wander off on their own to any extent or to explore the places they wanted to see. Most of the time on these tours was wasted, intentionally, by the Soviet authorities, who organized receptions and parties by young Communist organizations and by the Pioneers, that is, the branch organization of the Komsomol which embraces the very youngest children. There would be songs and cheers and greetings and of course the inevitable numerous photographs of the happy faces. Sometimes whole days of the holiday were wasted on this kind of organized jollification.

The bait that the Russians employed to encourage foreign students to go on these holidays was the 2,000 roubles pocket money paid to each student who agreed to participate. However, in 1960, as in 1959, it was announced that the 2,000 roubles payment would not be made. In fact the last time that the pocket money was paid out was in 1958. The excuse given by the Russians was that the money had to be used to pay for the holiday fares

of the many other foreign students who wanted to travel to and inside Russia.

The only African student that I remember during my time to travel on his own was a friend of mine from Ghana. He went to Kiev and further south in Russia. But he only managed to make the trip because he was absolutely determined, and before he got permission for it he had to undergo a rigorous grilling from the Director. Another African student friend of mine simply wanted to go to the outer suburbs of Moscow to visit the parents of his fiancée. An hour or two after he got there the police called and demanded to see his passport. At first he refused to show it, saying that he was not committing any crime. However, the police threatened his fiancée and her parents until she was compelled to reveal his name. The police then telephoned the University to ask if he had permission to travel outside the limit. When they discovered he did not have this permission they threatened him with arrest, unless he left and returned to Moscow within two hours.

In theory it is possible for a foreigner, as for any other Russian, to buy a ticket to travel anywhere in the Soviet Union, but in fact documents are checked before you get on the train or just afterwards and if you are a foreigner on a long distance train you will be put off unless your documents carry the appropriate endorsement from the Soviet authorities giving you permission to travel.

Another thing that makes it virtually impossible for a foreign student to travel is that he will be unable to get accommodation in any hotel unless he has the proper documents. I experienced this difficulty myself. Partly as a protest against the insanitary living conditions in the Institute's hostel,

and the difficulty of doing any work there, I decided to move to a hotel for a "symbolic" two or three days. I did not even attempt to go out of Moscow, but went to the Peking Hotel, where I had been accommodated on my first arrival in Moscow and where I was known to the administration. The manager looked at my passport and then telephoned the University authorities. The manager then turned to me and said there was no room in the hotel. He was careful not to give me a direct refusal. I became very angry because I knew he was lying. I asked him whether he thought I was a child. Some of the staff had already told me that there were many rooms free in the hotel which, in any case, was only about half full at this time of year. The manager of the hotel finally shrugged his shoulders and simply asked me: "What can I do?" (in Russian, *Chto ya mogu delat?*). On my return to the Institute I was summoned by the Director. In reply to his questioning, I told him that conditions were so bad that I had decided to go to the hotel. But I am afraid it did not have any effect on our conditions in the Institute.

During the holidays, of course, all students had to live in the accommodation provided by the University. This did not make much difference for most of the year. Our holidays in winter were only three or four days at the New Year, and about two weeks in the spring. But in the long summer holidays it was a different matter. The only alternatives one had were to go on the conducted tour, to stay in Moscow in the students' hostel or, with great difficulty, and after endless interrogation and unpleasantness to get special permission to go off on one's own.

With one exception, it was, of course, quite

impossible for a student to get a part-time job in Moscow, or anywhere else in Russia, if he wanted for example, to save up enough money for a holiday on his own. The only jobs available were the ones the Soviet Government allocated through the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee or with *Moscow Radio*. But of course not every student could get these. Employees were selected on the basis of their reliability to the Soviet cause, as displayed during lectures and on other occasions and reported to the Soviet authorities. I remember on one occasion a lecturer asked if we wanted to go on one of the organized trips to Kiev, Leningrad or the Black Sea during the coming summer holidays. One of the students in our class, an Iraqi, said he wanted to get a job for the holidays to save up for his fare to be able to fly home to Iraq. He asked the lecturer her advice. She replied that it was extremely difficult even for Soviet students to get jobs and she thought foreign students would have no chance. We knew that she was lying about the Russian students because many of them from the University had already been taken off to do work on the collective farms and building sites even before term had ended.

Despite all the difficulties put in our way we did manage to make friends with quite a few Russians outside official circles. And they were very good friends too, as we soon learned. For it was a considerable risk to them to associate with foreign students, even with Africans, with whose countries the Soviet Government pretended to be so friendly. Many a good Russian family took us foreign students into their midst and treated us with kindness. Some of them unfortunately, were made to suffer later by the Soviet authorities simply because they had befriended us too well.

The Russians of course have many ways of finding out about their own citizens who associate with foreigners. As most students discovered, every house block contains at least one employee of the secret police, or house-warden, who reports on the guests that his tenants have. Also many neighbours are spies. In the immediate neighbourhood of the Institute where we Africans lived there seemed to be an exceptionally close watch kept on the inhabitants of the rooms and flats. I remember vividly on several occasions going to visit friends who lived in a room in one of the blocks near the University. Every house I passed in the neighbourhood of the Institute seemed to have at least one person staring at me to see if I would go into any of the houses. When I went in and knocked at the door I would hear other doors opening. Someone would then go round to the other rooms and announce, "An African comrade has come" (in Russian : *Africanski tovarischch prishel*). Several of my friends' neighbours would then come in and start asking question. At first this procedure was probably meant to be a friendly gesture. Afterwards it became embarrassing, because I and my friends realised that at least one of these neighbours would be acting as an informer. When I spoke about this to other African students at the University they told me they had had more or less the same experience.

I DECIDE TO LEAVE MOSCOW

I HAVE often been asked whether I was actually followed in Moscow. My answer is both "Yes" and "No". Normally one is not followed, at least not if one stays inside Moscow. On the other hand at one time or another probably every foreign student has been followed by Soviet secret police agents. I only know of one occasion on which I and some fellow African friends of mine were definitely followed. We had been to a hotel in the centre of Moscow because we heard that a friend of ours from Africa had arrived. After leaving the hotel we got on to a bus. When we got out, two men, who had also entered the bus when we did, followed us, though it was not for some minutes before we realised that we were being followed. We decided to go into the Metro, or underground railway. The two plain-clothes policemen, as we realised they must be, followed us. We first went to one platform, then moved to another. Our movements were exactly copied by the two watchers. We only eluded them by jumping out at a station just when the doors were closing, and left them behind.

All this may sound rather trivial and frivolous but it creates an atmosphere where you feel you are being watched and spied upon the whole time, even

though you know that this is not so. From other students we heard about microphones placed in foreign students' rooms. They were certainly there in the rooms of British, American (including Latin American) and other Western students in the main building. Of this we had indirect proof. In addition an African friend of mine who had a room in the main University building suddenly saw a small hole appear one day in his ceiling and suspected that this might be connected with some microphone device. On the other hand we were all fairly certain, for various reasons, that our rooms in the University did not contain these mechanical listening devices. There was, of course, really no need for them because the Russian student policemen took their place.

When we discussed this subject amongst ourselves and with Russian friends we felt sure that the new separate University which the Russians were going to establish under the name of The People's Friendship University would certainly be well covered with microphones in most if not all of the rooms, whether the Russians used the system of the student police or not.

I would not like to leave the impression that we were suspicous of all the Russian students at the University. On the contrary, most of us had very good friends among them. Many of our Russian friends and colleagues would get into trouble because of us. Suddenly they would try to avoid meeting you. And then in a less public place they would come up to us and confess that they had been warned off by the Komsomol from associating with foreigners. Many of the Russian students, too, showed a healthily independent turn of mind. For example, when they were being persuaded to go and

meet Mr. Khrushchev in the streets on his return from his triumphant tours they would often simply ignore the summons and show that they saw through the propaganda.

One of the things which often brought us together with the Russian students was listening to modern jazz music. Large numbers of them appreciated the better kind of jazz and also realized and acknowledged that it had developed from the folk music of the African people. Of course the American students had many jazz records and often used to listen to jazz and rock-'n'-roll. It was really the popularity that this type of music gained among Russian students, thus bringing them into close contact and friendship with American and African students, that really decided the Soviet authorities to condemn this kind of music. In other words, as we saw quite obviously, rock-'n'-roll was condemned by Khrushchev and the authorities not on aesthetic, but mainly on political, grounds.

I have already spoken about the Soviet efforts to prevent us and their own students from listening to foreign radio broadcasts. Another way in which we African students felt cut off from the outside world was in being unable to buy any non-Communist newspapers in Moscow at all. In some places one could buy such Communist newspapers as the *Daily Worker*, which is the organ of the British Communist Party, or *l'Humanité*, the French equivalent. I never saw a single African newspaper on sale.

It was this atmosphere of petty restriction in our personal life and official opposition to Africans having a political opinion of their own which makes life for the African students in Moscow very trying, if not impossible. At the end of my first academic

year in Moscow I decided I was doing myself and my country more harm than good by staying there under such humiliating conditions. I certainly have no quarrel with the Russian people. On the contrary, I entertain only feelings of friendship towards them. But I was not going to allow the Soviet authorities to treat me as a kind of puppet whose mind and personality was to be moulded according to their will. I asked for an exit visa saying that I wished to visit Europe for a holiday.

Officially I am still a member of Moscow University and I have had no open breach with the Soviet authorities. I wish to put this on record because Soviet propaganda, judging by its past performance with at least one fellow countryman of mine, may well start saying that I was expelled from the University for breaking its regulations. As I have said I still have many friends in Russia, both Russians and fellow Africans. Some of the latter even charged me before I left to let the world know the true facts of how foreign students are treated in Russia. If I have succeeded in telling at least part of the story I feel I have done my duty towards my friends in Russia and towards my fellow Africans in my own continent.